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A Christian Defense for Free Markets

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A Christian Defense for Free Markets

Western Christians often struggle to determine what the relationship between capitalism and Christianity should be. Some argue that Christianity and capitalism are in opposition. Capitalism is notorious for its association with greed and the pursuit of self-interest, while Christianity is a religion focused on the giving of self to love and care for others. After all, Acts 2 depicts a very collective original Christian community with no sign of participation in market activities. "And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need" (Acts 2:44-45 NLT). Some Christians use this picture of the collective economic structure of the earliest Christians to argue for the use of socialist systems. However, Christianity was never meant to stay as a small local community of believers. As the message of the gospel and the impact of God’s Kingdom through the body of Christ is spread across the nations and peoples of the world, do the same organizational and economic strategies and systems apply? I would argue that the Christian values of love, self-sacrifice, and community care should stay the same, but the economic system in which they operate on a large scale must not be the same. Christians must reconcile the large scale economic system in which they operate with their faith and also determine if it is conducive to their work for God’s Kingdom. The call for Christians to embody the Kingdom of God not only can be reconciled with free market capitalism, but the two can be quite complimentary. Support for this complimentary relationship between Christian calling and capitalism can be found in three major steps. First, the inherent nature of capitalism must be separated from sin and reconciled with the Christian value system. Second, capitalism must be shown as the best current system for accomplishing the Christian mission and goals of the
Kingdom of God on this earth. Finally, it must be argued that engagement of the Christian body in capitalist systems will result in a further improvement of capitalism’s benefit to mankind.

To begin to reconcile capitalism to Christianity and ultimately frame it as the best current economic system for the embodiment of God’s Kingdom, the misconceptions about the inherent nature of free market capitalism must be cleared. The evils and injustices that occur within capitalist systems are the result of sin, not the intrinsic nature of capitalism. One of the most common evils associated with capitalism is greed. Some have even said that capitalism runs on greed at its core. This is completely false. Although private enterprise and profits are a natural stimulus of capitalism, this does not directly correlate to greed. Greed is a sin of excessive and destructive desire for wealth and possessions. The desire for profits is not inherently wrong and is actually beneficial to the overall economic system and helps to bring overall prosperity. It is when this lust for money overwhelms the desire for God, justice, and other greater goods, that it becomes the sin of greed which mars the system of capitalism.

Another evil that is often associated with capitalism is self-centeredness. Many people argue that capitalism is built on people acting out of their own self-interest which begets a multitude of evils from selfish actions of individuals and groups in capitalist systems. While it may be true that capitalism, in at least some sense, functions on self-interest, the sin of self-centeredness and the evils it produces are not inherent to the function of capitalism. First, I would argue pure self-interest is not an accurate depiction of the driver of capitalist markets and decision making. If this were true, we would not see people accumulating wealth in order to pass it onto their children. This is why economist Milton Friedman once said that the American capitalist society is really a “family society” not an “individualist society”. One of the greatest accomplishments of capitalism and private property rights is allowing average people to
accumulate wealth for security of well-being and other uses outside of personal consumption. Having a continuing right to one’s assets gives a family, or a business, incentive to save income and accumulate assets instead of spending all of their income. This allows them to create future financial security for themselves, their families, descendants, employees, and other related parties. It allows them to donate some of their wealth to their churches and other non-profit organizations; or just be able to help others in financial need. Note that all of this was made possible by the ability to have business profit or excess income; so it is clear that both are good unless abused.

One could argue that the incentive for people to take care of their families and descendants is still considered self-interest. This is a valid argument, because even though it may not be pure self-interest, it is still interest for those close to you and not necessarily for all other people. However, this self-interest is still not inherently bad. Within a capitalist economy that is working properly, people and businesses that are motivated by self-interest collectively produce a mutually beneficial system overall. Acting based on self-interest does not necessarily mean you are acting at the expense of another person. The beauty of capitalism is that it is not a zero-sum game. A gain for one person does not automatically mean a loss for someone else. The market system allows for both sides of a transaction to operate by self-interests and both receive a net gain from the transaction. Operation based on self-interest does not become evil until the desire for benefiting oneself becomes predatory of the interests and well-being of others. This is when the sins of self-centeredness and lack of regard for others create evils that not only hurt people but also often create inefficiency in capitalist systems. One example is when businesses are able to obtain significant market power or even a monopoly in the market of a certain good or service. The circumstances that allow businesses to gain this power are
sometimes the result of a distortion of capitalism in the first place, such as government franchises. However, even when they have this power they have a choice of how to use it. A business has the ability to operate efficiently and make a profit without harming consumers and the market. Although, if they chose to abuse their market power by restricting the supply of the good to raise prices or by committing price discrimination, they are not only crossing the line from self-interest to self-centeredness, but they also are creating an overall loss in the market by hindering the operation of supply and demand, the invisible hand, which is the core of capitalism. Therefore, this evil is not inherent to capitalism, but is a distortion of it.

Since sin distorts capitalism, it follows that Christian influence in capitalist systems should bring them to a more pure state. Capitalism functions better without greed, self-centeredness, corruption, dishonesty, and a variety of other sins and evils present in its systems. Of course, in this fallen sinful world, these evils can never be completely purged until Jesus returns. However, the Christian body working within capitalism to fill it with glimpses of God’s Kingdom and embed its principles and value system, will help mend the brokenness in capitalist systems and improve their function in the world. This idea pairs well with Cornelius Plantinga Jr.’s description of sin and shalom in his book Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be. Plantinga describes the concept of shalom as “universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight” or simply the way God created things to be, in complete harmony with each other and Himself. (Plantinga 10). From this concept of shalom, Plantinga develops the understanding of sin as a violation of shalom. The presence of sin in the world is what ultimately prevents shalom and makes the world “not the way it’s supposed to be” (Plantinga 12-14). Using Plantinga’s framing of sin to illustrate the impact of the Christian body on capitalism, we can see that the result is a shared gain for the Kingdom of God and the success of capitalism. When Christians actively live and
work within capitalist systems as representatives of Christ with an intent to create shalom, they will begin to replace the evils and dysfunctions in the systems with harmonies and wholeness. Markets riddled with greed and corruption will become more just and purposeful in their focus and function. The cultures and social norms of the capitalist markets will take on a character that is more honest and has greater concern for justice for all. More capitalists will have a motivation for profits that is no longer idolatrous, but rather is pure of heart and contains a genuine regard for others. This will lead to markets, businesses, and careers that bring life and prosperity instead of harm and destruction. As a Christian sense of community as well as respect for God’s creation grows, dysfunctions of capitalism created by the abuse of the motivation self-interest will be reduced. One economic example is the tragedy of the commons, which occurs when individuals neglect the well-being of society in the pursuit of personal gain. The permeation of Christian values of self-sacrifice and compassion for the poor will not only lead to increased generosity from those blessed with wealth and success, but will also reform markets so that they longer exploit those who are most vulnerable. This work of mending shalom within capitalist systems makes progress for both capitalism and the Kingdom of God. Capitalist systems are brought to a more pure state and are more efficient and successful, while the Kingdom of God shines more brightly as people flourish and more of creation is brought into connection with God.

In response to this argument that capitalism is distorted by sin and can be made more pure and successful by Christian influence, one could retort that socialism is also tainted by sin. Since one could point to sin as the cause of many evils resulting from socialism as well, what makes capitalism any better? There are two different ways to argue for capitalism as the best economic system for the Christian body to utilize in their calling to embody the Kingdom of
God. The first is a realist response which takes into consideration the fallen state of the world and then evaluates which economic system operates best within the fallen world to produce the greatest good and can be used most effectively for the mission of the Christian body. The second is an idealist response that sets aside the fallen state of the world and seeks to evaluate which economic system in its pure state operates in a way that reconciles most closely with the Christian faith and value system.

In the realist response, the fallen state of the world due to sin, as previously discussed with Plantinga’s framing of sin and shalom, is a key assumption. In the book, *Jesus Have I Loved, but Paul?*, J.R. Daniel Kirk describes the same state of creation through a slightly different frame. While Plantinga used the idea of shalom as the intended ordered creation and sin as the breaker of shalom, Kirk emphasizes the narrative of the role of humans in the Kingdom of God. To Kirk, the “rightly ordered cosmos” instituted by God entails a special place for humans as representatives of God’s dominion and care over the earth. When humans fall to the temptation of the serpent and sin against God, they forfeit their rightful place as God’s agents in dominion over the earth. The serpent took over the position of ruler over the earth from humans and the position of counselor of humans from God, and thus the relationship between God and humans was fractured (Kirk 33-34). Kirk goes on to explain how Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection work to restore this broken relationship. One of Kirk’s main points is the idea that Jesus not only announced but also inaugurated the dominion of God (Kirk 33). This means that the return of God’s dominion on earth with humans as His agents has already begun and the glimpses of the new creation can be seen through these representatives. However, it is important to note, while the efforts of Christians can spread healing, reconciliation, the gospel message, and God’s glory across the earth, the work of humans will never even come close to fully
realizing God’s Kingdom and the new creation on earth. The earth is still under the dominion of sin and even with a repaired relationship to God, humans cannot perfectly resist its temptations or escape its effects until Jesus returns to finish his work of restoration. Acknowledging this Christian belief, the realist response must consider the reality of this sinful world when evaluating economic systems.

Based on the fallen world assumption, the realist would also make an assumption that some form of government is required to prevent chaos and lawlessness. St. Augustine described government as a concession by God to prevent sin and conflict. Political authority creates an imperfect peace through coercion. The greater evil of violence and destructive internal chaos is traded for unequal power dynamics, injustice, and removal of freedoms on a range of levels depending on the particular government. According to Augustine, worldly government is not part of the intended state of God’s creation, rather without original sin, human groups would be guided by a benevolent parental kind of authority. However, in the fallen state of the earth worldly government is needed for the masses (Crane 13-14). This is why the realist response would not even consider communism in its ideal state as a viable economic strategy. If complete equality and removal of private property is attempted in this world, there will either be chaos, or a heavy-handed government will rise up to enforce the system, control the economy, and most likely oppress the common people. This is what happened when the communist system was attempted by Russia, China, North Korea, and others. It eventually formed into a socialist system so that the goal of “equality” could be controlled and enforced by a government. Of course this need for the concession of government in this fallen world also applies to capitalism.

Capitalism favors more private ownership of capital and property with an emphasis on economic efficiency. Socialism favors more public (government) ownership of capital and
property with an emphasis on economic equality. Even though capitalism favors a much smaller role of government in the economy, in the fallen world government is still needed to oversee a largescale population operating in the system of capitalism. If there was no government to enforce private property rights and provide laws, policing, criminal justice, national defense, etc. then the free markets of capitalism would not be able to operate properly. Economic systems and processes would be disrupted by unhindered violent and chaotic actions, and there would be no security of wealth and possessions. For instance, without government provision of a strong national defense, there would be no defense or deterrent from external attack or invasion. Free-market commerce or any economy does not operate very well in a country being bombed or experiencing a war within its borders. Even free-market capitalism needs some limited form of coercion and control of government on society to protect it from this broken, sinful world.

Now that the underlying assumptions have been established, the realist argument for capitalism over socialism can be made. First, capitalism has already increased overall well-being and reduced poverty more than socialism or any other economic system. If one just simply looks back over recent history, it is easy to see that the introduction of capitalist systems have improved the standard of living in those systems exponentially, while those under socialist systems have seen stagnation or possibly even reductions of standards of living. This can be seen in the contrast between the growth and prosperity of the economies and people in the United States and Western Europe as opposed to the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The historic example of West Germany vs. East Germany or even the current example of South Korea vs. North Korea show a stark contrast of capitalism and socialism within the same geographic area and general ethnic culture with a clear dividing line between prosperity on the capitalist side versus poverty and discontent on the socialist side.
However, to ensure that this argument for capitalism is not built just on appearance and a few exemplary cases, a large part of this argument will be built on global empirical research presented by Peter Leeson in his article *Two Cheers for Capitalism?* published in the academic journal *Society*. The title of Leeson’s article refers to his challenge to the view that he calls “two cheers for capitalism”. According to Leeson, the “two cheers for capitalism” view says that advocacy for capitalism should be cautious and modest because the evidence for capitalism’s effect on development is ambiguous and mixed (Leeson 227). “According to this view, although markets can be important contributors to development, they can also undermine it” (Leeson 227). Some who hold this view would support capitalism as means for development but only to a point, they believe it has to be limited. “This view suggests that even if capitalism is good for development, “excessive” or “uncontrolled” capitalism isn’t. Beyond some point, more capitalism is counterproductive. Laissez faire isn’t conducive to development because maximal capitalism is past the optimum.” (Leeson 228). Through the presentation of his research, Leeson seeks to refute these views and argue that capitalism does have a clear relationship to development and maximal capitalism brings maximal development, therefore, capitalism deserves “three cheers”.

To make his argument, Leeson compares countries that have become more capitalist in the last quarter century to countries that have become less capitalist in the last quarter century. He then uses four development indicators: average income, life expectancy, years of schooling, and democracy. Even though Leeson does not write this article from a Christian perspective, these indicators apply directly to what matters to the Christian body and its pursuit of God’s Kingdom. Increase in average income means a decrease in poverty and an overall increase in standard of living for citizens of that country. As discussed before, even though the Christian
faith discourages idolatry of income and wealth, greater income and wealth helps produce greater human flourishing on this earth and can be used in great ways for God’s glory. Increased life expectancy means a decrease in premature deaths and usually points to overall improved health of citizens in that country. Good health is another key aspect of the Christian concept of human flourishing and the gift of life is certainly a sacred concept. Increased years of schooling in a country point to better educated citizens. Education serves as a tool to help provide people with better access to jobs and a decent livelihood, while increasing their dignity and freedom. Increased democracy means more political freedom for the country’s citizens and a more balanced distribution of power. Less oppression and a greater voice for the masses and represents a society that is closer to the intended state of creation. Leeson determined whether each country became more or less capitalist based on Fraser Institute’s economic freedom index. The index is based on five criteria: size of government, legal structure and security of property rights, access to sound money, freedom to trade internationally, and credit, labor, and business regulation. The index ranges from zero (completely unfree) to ten (completely free). For each country Leeson compares its economic freedom score in 2005 to its score in 1980 to determine if it had become more capitalist (increased) or less capitalist (decreased) (Leeson 229). The data for the four development indicators are drawn from various cited sources of empirical study and charted by Leeson over five year intervals from 1980 to 2005.

For countries that became more capitalist over the period, all four development indicators showed significant increases over time on average in these countries for each five year interval. Average income in these countries, measured in GDP per capita in constant year 2000 dollars, increased from $7600 to nearly $11,800 over the entire period, a 43% increase. Average life expectancy in these countries increased almost five years over the entire period.
of schooling in these countries increased from 4.7 to just over 6 from 1980 to 1995 (data was not available for years 2000 and 2005). Average level of democracy in these countries, measured on a level of zero to ten with ten representing “complete democracy” or “total political freedom”, increased from 3.8 to 6.4 over the entire period, a 68% increase (Leeson 229-230). These four indicators clearly show that the countries that became more capitalist over the last quarter century saw significant development and increase in well-being.

Contrarily, out of the countries that became less capitalist over the period from 1980 to 2005, Leeson noted that many not only declined minimally on the economic freedom index, but also already enjoyed very high levels of economic freedom. For example, the United States became less capitalist by 0.09 points on Fraser’s index, yet it remained the 7th most capitalist country in the world. Leeson did not include these countries in his presentation of data from countries that became notably less capitalist with the justification that these countries had “surplus funds” built up from decades of capitalism. Due to these surplus funds, relatively minimal increases in government intervention had little negative effect on their developmental growth. Leeson identifies only five countries that became significantly less capitalist from 1980 to 2005: Myanmar, Rwanda, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe. Each of these countries lost more than a point on the economic freedom index, a 20-40% decrease depending on the country. Average income in these countries was stagnant with an insignificant increase from around $3600 to around $3700, compared to the 43% increase for countries that became more capitalist. Average Life expectancy decreased by two years and average level of democracy decreased almost a point from 3.5 to 2.6. Years of schooling is the only development indicator that showed a material increase for these countries, from 2.6 to 3.4. However, the increase of years of schooling for countries that became more capitalist was 40% larger than the increase of years of
schooling for countries that became less capitalist (Leeson 231-232). This data shows a statistically significant difference in the level of development based on these four indicators between the effect of increased capitalism and decreased capitalism. Capitalism’s use of free-markets and private ownership clearly fosters human flourishing.

To further support his claim that capitalism does not become counterproductive after a certain level, Leeson plotted each development indicator against the economic freedom index for the year 1995. For each of the four graphs, each country was a data point with its economic freedom score as its x-coordinate, and its score for the development indicator as its y-coordinate. The trend in the graph for average income showed an exponential increase as the level of capitalism increased and the trend in the other three indicators showed a constant increase as the level of capitalism increased. If it were true that after a certain point higher levels of capitalism began to undermine development, then the graphs would show a trend of diminishing returns, like a logarithmic curve or a parabola with a decreasing effect on the upper end of the x-axis. Since the data does not show this, the idea that maximal capitalism results in maximal development is empirically supported.

These findings strongly support the argument that capitalism has done better than socialism in producing an increase in well-being and freedom, which are integral parts of the Christian calling to foster human flourishing. It is also important to note that Lesson’s research showed a significant increase in capitalism globally on average. The Fraser economic freedom index for the world rose on average from around 5.45 to 6.55 from 1980 to 2005. According to data on the World Banks’s website, the world poverty rate, based on the population living on less than $1.90 a day, decreased from 41.91% in 1981 to 20.45% in 2005. The World Bank’s most recent estimate (2013) puts the world poverty rate at 10.67%. Unsurprisingly, the global shift
towards capitalism and freer markets in the last quarter century have contributed towards a great reduction in world poverty.

The previous arguments based on empirical data suggest that capitalism has historically done better than socialism in benefiting the world from a Christian perspective. However, this is just one side of the argument for the complementarity of Christianity and capitalism. It must also be argued that increased Christian engagement in capitalism would further improve capitalism’s benefit. A previous section had already touched on this in suggesting that Christian influence on capitalism would work to mend its distortions. This would help capitalism be more pure and more efficient. If capitalism is less hindered by distortions and overreaching government regulations, then the benefit of capitalism will increase based on Leeson’s evidence that more capitalism, characterized by freer markets and less regulation, means more development.

Engagement in capitalism by the Christian body should also create healthier business relations. Businesses in capitalist systems can be agents of tremendous good or terrible evil. The difference between the two outcomes often depends on the internal culture and value structure of the business. Members of the Christians body that are following their calling to embody the Kingdom of God within businesses can make a transformative impact on capitalist systems. Whether they are small-business entrepreneurs, corporate executives, or employees in businesses of various sizes, these active Christians will further the Kingdom and improve capitalism in many ways. They will help mend the broken people in the business world who need the love of Christ. They will mend broken relationships from internal conflicts with employees to external conflicts with various stakeholders of business. They will set the moral and ethical tone for doing business with integrity and regard for all stakeholders, from customers
and stockholders, to local communities and the environment. If Christian business people realize and take ownership of the idea of their work in capitalist businesses as a way to serve Christ, the result will certainly be good for both capitalism and the Kingdom of God.

Another way Christians can expand the benefit of capitalism is through philanthropy. Christians can not only help businesses be more successful, but guide them toward giving some of the profit gained through their success toward worthy causes that help those who are less fortunate. Likewise, members of the Christian body who are successful can give their personal time and money as well. However, the most important and effective way for Christians to help the poor is not through handouts, but through giving them a hand-up. The relatively recent development strategy of microfinance can be an extremely beneficial tool for the Christian body. Local non-profit Hope International is a prime example of an organization of Christians using the capitalist strategy of microfinance to serve the poor. Many of the world’s poor do not have access to simple financial services that we take for granted in more developed capitalist countries. For example, they do not have access to banks to save their money or take out loans, nor a secure place to keep large sums even if they could accumulate them in their own houses. This means that in the event of an emergency from illness, lost harvest, etc. they might not be able to cover the cost. Also the only access to loans that they have is through loan sharks who charge extreme interest rates and often seek to exploit them. Without access to loans, they are unable to obtain enough capital to grow a business or make other investments. Lack of access to these savings and loans as well as inadequate education and little access to property and business rights are the primary forces that keep them in poverty. Hope International seeks to help the world’s poor, not through just giving them money or food which only makes them dependent and further damages their local economies, but through providing them with micro-finance services.
Essentially, they give poor people access to capital and markets so that they can bring themselves out of poverty. Along with forming savings groups and making small loans, Hope International also provides training to help them start or expand their businesses. Of course, through this process of providing the poor with the resources that empower them to succeed, they also have a chance to share the love of Christ. Many of the savings groups participate in Bible studies and Hope International’s website is full of testimonies of lives changed economically and spiritually through their services and ministry. Hope International is a true embodiment of this concept of Christianity and capitalism as complimentary. The use of microfinance is just one good way that the Christian body can use capitalism as a tool to work for the Kingdom of God.

The second way to approach an argument for capitalism as the best economic system for use by the Christian body is the idealist response. Instead of focusing on the results of the systems in our world, this response focuses on the fundamental properties of different systems to determine which operates in a way that is nearest to Christian values. It is a little bit harder to argue for capitalism from this angle, because it is an argument from ideals, which is typically more conducive to other systems, especially communism. Capitalism is more heavily built on the laws of how the real imperfect world operates. However, there still are some strong arguments for capitalism. First, free-market capitalism is more conducive to freedom as opposed to control than other systems. Remember St. Augustine’s argument that government is a concession for a sinful world; this means that less government control of markets and capital would be an improvement. Free-market capitalism allows the masses to decide the how the market operates as opposed to socialism in which the government sets prices, controls the means of production, and heavily regulates private enterprise if any is allowed. Governmental control was not part of God’s intentions for humanity and generally freedom from bondage from an
individual to a communal scale exemplifies the Kingdom of God as well. Free market capitalism also allows for communal care by choice. Socialist systems redistribute income and wealth by force and establish government programs to care for those in need. I would argue that capitalism leaving philanthropy and community care up to the responsibility of individuals and private organizations as a more ideal means of addressing those needs based on the Christian faith.

I would also argue that capitalism better suits the Biblical concept of “one body with many parts” than other systems such as communism. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul compares the body of Christ to the human body to illustrate the importance of the variety of different gifts, abilities, social status, and ethnicity of each member. “If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything? But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, “I don’t need you.” The head can’t say to the feet, “I don’t need you” (1 Corinthians 12:17-21 NLT). These verses seem to be saying that it is good that not everyone is the same and that not everyone has the most desirable gifts and vocations, because then everyone would be doing same thing and so many vocations and needed societal positions would not be filled. This is why the concepts of specialization and free enterprise in capitalism are so important. In capitalism, people are free to choose a career path and vocation that match their gifts and abilities which is not necessarily the case under socialism or communism. Capitalism also recognizes that even though everyone should ideally have equal opportunity, not everyone will have an equal outcome. Since people have different gifts and abilities, not everyone will be able to achieve the same success as everyone else in every field or vocation. But this is a good thing because communities and the world as a whole need people with a variety of different skill
sets and vocations. Some people will be called to a vocation in fields that generate a lot of personal income while they contribute to the society, such as doctors. They will be able to be generous and support those who may have vocations that generate less personal wealth but contribute just as much to society, such as social workers or missionaries. On the other hand, communism and socialism do not allow as much freedom of vocation and enterprise in their effort to make everyone’s outcome equal. In extreme cases, the government not only controls the means of production but also assigns jobs and societal roles to its citizens. This undermines the specialization that Paul was talking about where each person has their own special role to play based on their gifts, in which each role produces needed value to the whole body, though not necessarily receives the same earthly glory. A government does not have the ultimate knowledge to be able to assign these vocations as effectively as the free market.

Finally, capitalism better suits the Biblical concept that you “harvest what you plant” (Galatians 6:7 NLT). Capitalism supports the motivation and discipline that hard work will lead to reaping rewards while laziness and foolishness comes with consequences. This is a God given concept that helps humans take responsibility for their actions and learn from their mistakes. By attempting to achieve equality of outcome, socialism and communism undermine this discipline.

In review of both the realist and idealist responses, I personally think the realist response is more applicable to the Christian body’s decision of what economic system to utilize on this earth, but both responses do bring value to the evaluation. Since the fallen state of the earth is the reality we live in, I think it is a crucial variable to be considered in deciding what system we use. However, it is important when using a realist argument to not let it become an ends justifies the means argument. The idealist argument helps one to also better support the means of capitalism as good in conjunction with the presentation of capitalism’s superior achievements for
God’s Kingdom. So ultimately, a mixture of the two make the best case for capitalism from a Christian perspective.

Some Christians could try to argue that the new creation will not use a capitalist system, so why should Christians attach themselves to capitalist systems when their goal is to embody glimpses of the new creation. To refute this argument from both angles, I would first argue that there certainly could be a market system in the new creation. I think that a restored creation could still have commerce and specialized vocations, but all sin and distortions are removed and labor no longer brings pain, stress, or fatigue, but only joy. I would even suggest there could still be money in the new creation. Although the love of money causes many evils in this fallen world, at its root it is simply just a means of exchange that helps make trade easier and more efficient. A new creation could have saints with various occupations providing different services and creating different goods and structures to be traded and exchange with others who specialize in other things. However, I do not wish to make any claims of certainty about what the new creation will be; so I would also argue that even if there are not capitalist systems in heaven, I do not think that is a good reason for Christians to separate themselves from these systems now. Christians should work within the worldly systems that surround them. Christians should not fully accept all aspects of the culture, but they also should not reject the system as a whole and separate themselves entirely from it. They will not be able to further God’s Kingdom and bring new people into it if they are entirely separated from the culture.

Miroslav Volf makes a similar argument in his book A Public Faith. Volf argues that in the complex cultures in which we live, both accommodation and separation from the worldly culture are diversions from the calling of the Christian faith. Christians should not seek to fully reconcile their faith with all aspects of the society in which they live, nor reject all aspects. They
also should not attempt to coercively change the culture as a whole to mirror their values. Volf advocates for a piecemeal transformative approach where Christians address aspects of the cultures in which they live in three ways. First, they can simply adopt some elements of the culture in which they live that are inconsequential as far as the Christian faith is concerned. Second, “the majority of the elements of a culture will be taken up but transformed from within.” Third, there may be some elements that Christians must reject (Volf 84-92). This is how Christians should approach capitalism on this earth. Instead of accepting or rejecting all aspects, they can accept the base system while transforming its impure elements and rejecting the evil distortions that result from the presence of sin in the system. This idea also relates to the class discussion of the spectrum of “we are home” to “we are not home” in regard to Christians place in this world or within various societies. For example, in the case of western capitalist systems, I would argue that Christians are at the point on the spectrum where they should seek to reform the capitalist systems in which they live, rejecting the sinful and broken parts without resisting the base system. This standpoint was framed as just to the right of the midpoint of the spectrum towards the “we are at home” side.

This proposal for Christian engagement in capitalist systems will produce a shared gain for the Kingdom of God and capitalism. If Christians take up this proposal, they will be following the call to embody the Kingdom of God and be able to achieve the Kingdom’s societal goals with the greater success. This action will also transform capitalist systems into a more pure state and increase capitalism’s benefits worldwide. These benefits also come without the need for compromising Christian values. Capitalism is not in opposition to Christianity, but the most useful economic tool currently available to the representatives of God’s Kingdom.
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